



THE ECONOMICS OF FOOD CHOICES

Archana* & Sabiha Vali**

*Asst. Professor, BVDU IHMCT, Pune

** Ex Prof. & Former Head, P.G.Dept. Of Home Science, RTM Nagpur University, Nagpur

Email ID: archanajanjal13@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to determine the preferences of consumers for traditional foods and whether they considered it as healthier than processed food. How often they went out dining with their families, what according to them were the reasons or pitfalls in the existing food habits, how often the convenience food takes place of the traditional home cooked food in their kitchen, where the perishable raw materials were purchased and the cooking methods they followed were the questions asked to the consumers.. The main objective was to gain general insight in consumer perceptions, expectations, and attitudes and to understand the relationship between consumers' expectations and consumers' attitudes to changes of traditional products and product acceptance, as well as exploring how attitudes toward innovation and contextual factors affect the appropriateness of traditional products. It was concluded that high family income and long hours worked increase time allocated to food-away-from-home, indicating that a preference for luxury and the opportunity cost of time outweigh nutritional concerns. This paper aims to understand the social dynamics surrounding the consumption of native, ethnic cuisine in the multicultural context of cities of Maharashtra.

Keywords: Food choices, traditional foods, consumer expectations, consumer attitude.

INTRODUCTION

Food choice is often a very individual decision. Nutritional information, health claims, together with price, origin, and brand may play an important role to motivate consumers in making their choices (1). We face today, both at the national and global level, a serious challenge with

“Health–Nutrition–Well-Being,” requiring a more rapid adaptation to changing economic trends and new thinking, including the alternative food system, as a general expression of the concern for synergy between the social returns and business success and for improving the quality of our lives. Food quality continues to be



an important topic, as consumer behavior witnesses growing diet-related health concerns, which confirms the current need to study traditional foods in order to enhance and improve the diet (2).

METHODOLOGY

A survey to study the Authentic Maharashtrian foods, cooking Methods used, the reasons or pitfalls in the existing food habits, information on procurement of perishable ingredients, was obtained from house wives using a questionnaire schedule. The area of research selected were the popular grade 'a' and grade 'b' cities of Maharashtra Like Pune, Mumbai, Nagpur. Questionnaire and Observation schedule was prepared, purposive sampling method was used where information was gathered from 200 participants using an interview and observation method and the primary data would be collected on the basis of above mentioned tools. Data was compiled, tabulated, and subjected to suitable statistical tests. The secondary data would be collected from books , Magazines

and websites viz. Taylor and Francis online, Emerald Journals, Epicurious.com, Wikipedia.com, www.maharashtraweb.com, www.vahrevah.com, www.maharashtratourism.com, Chef Toque, cuisines of India , Upper crust magazines , News papers like Times of India , Loksatta , Maharashtra Times, etc.

This study also examined the reasons why consumers ate outside their household and the influential factors which affected their food choices. Little research has been conducted examining the food choice behaviours of customers using survey questionnaire techniques. This study sought to describe a broader sample of customers and to gather information about reasons for food choice behaviour using a qualitative and observation method. Also interviews were conducted with participants. The interviews were focussed on discussions of food-related behaviours.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The responses of consumers with respect to simple questions on



local foods activity associated with preferences are given in figure 1.

Unhealthy foods are those containing little or no proteins, vitamins or minerals but are rich in salt, sugar, fats and are high in energy (calories). Some examples are chocolates, artificially flavoured aerated drinks, potato chips, ice creams, French fries etc. Frequent consumption of unhealthy processed food increases calorie intake without providing any nutrients, vitamins and minerals. There are different categories of Processed, Ready to eat and convenience foods, eg: Fast foods are foods already made or cooked to order within minutes for consumption like noodles, burgers, fried fish, milk shakes, chips, salads, pizzas, sandwiches, etc. Instant foods are those, which undergo special processing designed to dissolve or to disperse particles more rapidly in a liquid than the untreated product. For instance, instant noodles, soup powders, cornflakes fall under this category. Street foods comprises of a wide range of ready-to-eat foods

and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors and hawkers, especially on streets and other public places,(3)The study revealed the frequency of convenience food replacing traditional home cooked foods of the consumers, where 5% were always dependent on convenience food as they could not cook or they did not have any facility to cook food at their accommodation,30% quite often replaced the home cooked food with convenience food for a change, 40% rarely used convenience foods in their kitchens as they were well informed about the health problems caused because of it. Some suffered medical conditions and some were not very fond of outside or pre packed foods due to the synthetic taste it gave. consumption of processed foods may not only affect intake of nutrients, but in addition, increase the risk of exposure to various chemical additives Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that intake of a nutritionally balanced diet is not compromised with unwise intake



of various processed and convenience foods,(4).

Cultural factors also play an active role in determining individuals' convenience orientation. Different cultures have different attitudes and behaviours towards food preparation and consumption. Household income is considered a major determinant of convenience orientation. Food preparation skills can have an impact on convenience food consumption, as fast food is a commonly consumed convenience food. Involvement is another individual determinant argued to have an effect on convenience orientation. On the whole, attitudes and values towards meal preparation have an impact on individuals' convenience orientation

A study completed by Marquis confirmed the importance of convenience in determining food choice among young, single adults living in residence halls. It was found that convenience was the most important food choice factor, while price, pleasure, health, and

concern about weight followed after (5)

Observations thus reveal that frequency of convenience foods replacing traditional home cooked food was considerably low in the consumers of the present study. Local foods are likely demand driven, and the mere presence of local foods activity is not sufficient to result in healthier community outcomes.

Graphical Interpretation of opinions of consumers on the factors affecting existing food habits is shown in figure 2

Opinions on the factors affecting existing food habits revealed that (45%) of the people thought time constrain is the major factor affecting the food habits, as now a day's most of the ladies are also working so it gets too taxing for them to cope up with the house work and office work, plus the time consumed in travelling to the work place is tremendous and time consuming, (20%) said that easy availability of convenience food and too many restaurant options available also



were some of the factors. and (15%) people thought that it is the fast food culture that is affecting the food habits especially of the younger generation. young Indian consumer has passion for visiting fast food outlets for fun and change but home food is their first choice. They feel homemade food is much better than food served at fast food outlets. They have the highest value for taste and quality (nutritional values) followed by ambience and hygiene.

The graphical interpretation of procurement of perishable raw ingredients is shown in figure 3.

Regarding availability and procurement of perishable raw ingredients (55%) people preferred buying perishables from both local vender and super markets as not all the ingredients were available with the local vendor. Further most of the exotic ingredients were easily available at the super market. (20%) of consumers procured ingredients from super market and (25%) from the local vendor. purchasing process is an

essential part of everyday operation .Where an item is purchased should be determined by the price and the quality of the available supplies. However the spectacular growth of the super markets over the past few years has not been to the benefit of all. Some consumers have seen their access to healthy food curtailed as local shops have closed, and the quality of their diet has fallen; this is often referred to as the 'food deserts' phenomenon, (6).urban consumers food shopping patterns have been affected, and reveals many respondents, despite easy accessibility to the supermarket, continue to buy some of their foods in traditional stores or from local vendors.

The frequency of dining out with families is represented in figure 4

The study examined the reasons why consumers ate outside their household and the influential factors which affected their food choices, the changes that have taken place in the



family and relate these changes to where and how people eat. Data revealed that families are reacting to time pressures in a way that changes the way they prepare food while not affecting the end result. The results shows that 55% of consumers preferred dining out once in a month and claimed they would like to eat at home more often with their families, 25% preferred dining once in a fortnight, 15% dined once in a week and 5% dined only once or twice in a year on special occasions like birthdays, anniversary or festivals. Today, families are eating together, even if it means making mealtime part of the daily multi-tasking ritual. The extent to which families actually make a point to eat meals together could be an invaluable and irreplaceable component of healthy family relations. Culture, economy, and society have changed and people have again started ensuring that eating together occurs on a daily basis. (7)

Figure 5 presents the cooking methods followed at home by the Consumers

Results on cooking methods followed at home by the consumers showed that 65% people preferred slow cooking in their regular way, 18% preferred using instant food, 5% used microwave as a cooking method and 12% used all the three methods of cooking as and when needed or according to their convenience.

Individuals concerned more with nutrition or price than luxury devote more time to preparing food-cooked-at-home. High family income and long hours worked increase time allocated to food-away-from-home, indicating that a preference for luxury and the opportunity cost of time outweigh nutritional concerns. High education reduces time spent preparing food-cooked-at-home, yet increases both participation in this activity and time spent obtaining food-away-from-home, suggesting that a preference for



luxury and the opportunity cost of time dominate nutritional preference. Time allocation

decisions on food preparation vary greatly by race and ethnicity (8).

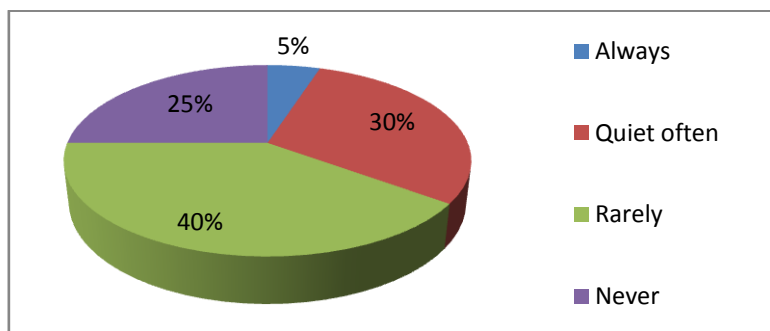


Fig1: Frequency of convenience food replacing Traditional home cooked food (%)

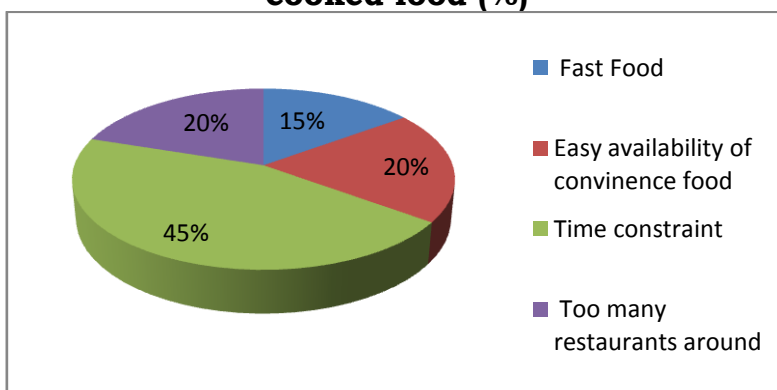


Fig 2: Opinions on the factors affecting existing food habits (%)

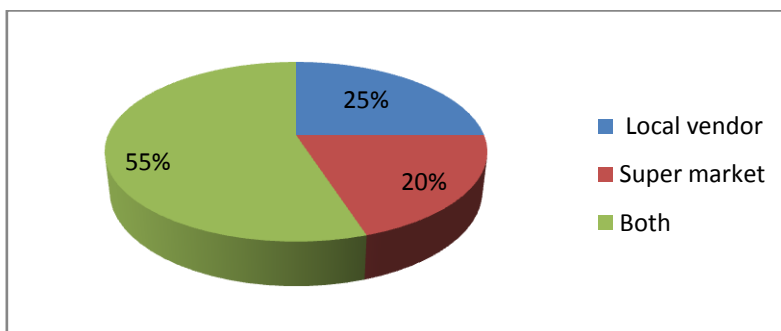


Fig 3: Procurement of Perishable raw ingredients (%)

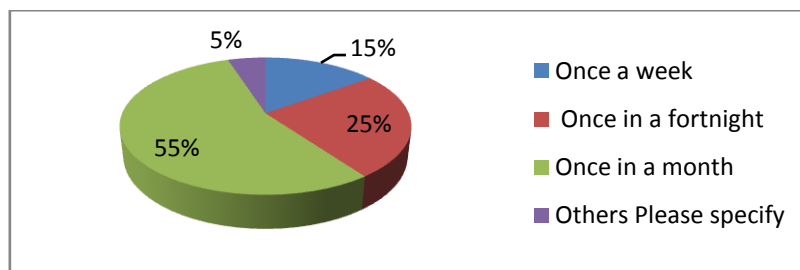


Fig 4: Frequency of dining out with family (%)

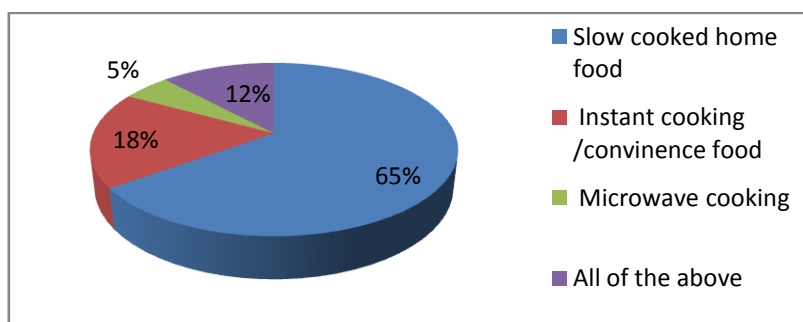


Fig 5: Cooking methods followed at home by Consumers (%)

REFERENCES

- Koponen, A., Sandell, M., Salminen, S., Lenoir-Wijinkoop, I., Nutrition economics: towards comprehensive understanding of the benefits of nutrition Microbial Ecology in Health and Disease Vol. 23, Iss. s2, 2012. Journal (Taylor and Francis online) <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.3402/mehd.v23i0.18585%40zmeh20.2012.23.issue-s2>
- Theodor, V.P., Gheorghe, O., Orzan, M., Stoica I., Published online: 14 May 2013, Health-Nutrition-Well-Being: A Romanian Perspective, Journal of Food Products Marketing Vol.19, 2012 – Iss.2: Journal (Taylor and Francis online) <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10454446.2013.766074>
- <http://vikaspedia.in/health/nutrition/dietary-guidelines-1/minimize-the-use-of-processed-foods>
- <http://vikaspedia.in/health/nu>



trition/dietary-guidelines-

1/minimize-the-use-of-

processed-foods

- Wales, M.E., Understanding the role of convenience in consumer food choices: a review article ,SURG ,Volume 2,No.2(2009),Wales
<https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/surg/article/view/983/1431>
- Shaw, H., (2006) "CSR in the Community: Redefining the Social Role of the Supermarket Giants", Social Responsibility Journal, Vol. 2 Issue: 2, pp.216-222,
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/eb059277>
- Herbst,K.C., Stanton,J.L.,(2007) "Changes in family dynamics predict purchase and consumption", British Food Journal, Vol. 109 Issue: 8, pp.648-655,
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/00070700710772435>
- Sanae, T., Chu-Ping Lo, (2011) "Balancing nutrition, luxury, and time constraints in food preparation choices", China Agricultural Economic Review, Vol. 3 Issue: 2, pp.245-265,Research paper, Emerald Group Publishing Limited
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/17561371111131344>